

The damage Biden has done

By Byron York

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THE DAMAGE BIDEN HAS DONE. Joe Biden will be president for the next 47 days. That's enough to make anyone nervous. The 82-year-old president had to be forced, by his own party, to withdraw from the 2024 race because he is no longer mentally and physically up to the job. But, of course, he is still in the job. With a world full of dangerous conflicts, that Biden is in charge for 47 more days, especially with Vice President Kamala Harris in a deep post-defeat funk, is deeply worrisome.

The immediate problem will end on Jan. 20, 2025, when Biden leaves office. But the United States, and the Democratic Party, will be dealing with the damage Biden leaves behind for years. There is a reason voters, for 40 years, were never interested in electing the openly ambitious Biden president of the U.S. — until the bizarre circumstances of the 2020 election. They knew for decades that he would not be a good president. And he has proven them right.

Leave the damage Biden has done to the U.S. — the massive migrant influx, the decline in the standard of living for millions of people, and the chaos abroad — for another day. Right now, a new analysis shows the damage Biden has done to his party, and it is immense.

Exit polls show that in the 2024 presidential election, 35% of voters identified as Republicans, while 34% identified as independents, and 31% identified as Democrats. In addition to a big jump in the number of self-identified independents, the news is that in 2024, Democrats slipped to third place in party ID.

“For the first time since the Watergate era, independents surpassed one of the major political parties to rank second in terms of party identification,” writes Republican pollster David Winston, who has just finished an in-depth study of the election results. “In this presidential election, the percentage of the electorate that self-identified as Democrats came in behind independents. ... This means that, in this election, Democrats are *de facto* more a third party than a dominant party in the electorate.”

Because of the Democrats' slide, Republicans had a 4-point advantage in party ID this year, 35% to 31%. According to Winston, that is the first time the GOP has had such an advantage in 10

presidential elections. Yes, 10 presidential elections.

The Democrats' fall between 2020 and 2024 was the party's worst performance in many years. But in terms of party identification, Democrats have been in decline since former President Barack Obama was first elected. In 2008, Democratic Party ID was 39%, a high that equaled the party's performance in the Bill Clinton years. But in 2012, Democratic Party ID ticked down to 38%. Then, in 2016, it slipped to 36%. In 2020, it moved up a notch to 37%. And then, in 2024, it plunged to 31%. That 6-point drop was bigger even than the Republican Party's decline in the final, disastrous years of the George W. Bush presidency.

"To provide a sense of scale of the size of this shift, a comparison of 37% of the 2020 presidential turnout to 31% of the 2024 turnout shows there were over 10 million fewer self-identified Democrats voting in this last election," Winston writes. "Independents went the other direction, going from 27% in 2020 to 34% in 2024, which resulted in an increase in self-identified independents of about 10 million."

What does it mean? The simplest explanation is that Biden and his fellow Democrats made the party so unattractive that millions of self-identified Democrats decided to call themselves independents instead. That doesn't mean they won't call themselves Democrats again in the future. But it does suggest that they were deeply unhappy with the Democratic Party in 2024. Here is how Winston [addresses the issue](#):

The big question that emerges from this election is what happened to the Democratic Party? In the last 10 presidential elections, the Democrats made up the largest portion of the electorate in terms of party identification (being even at 37% with Republicans for first in 2004). In this election, not only was that streak broken, but Democrats fell behind independents as well – into third place. The clear question from this election is – where did those Democrats go? There are two possibilities. First, they just didn't show up to vote, while independent turnout increased significantly. This theory would contradict the public survey data done prior to the election that said Democrats were very motivated to vote, while independents were not. The other is that many Democrats changed their party identification to independent. Either way, it shows an electorate that moved away from Democrats as a result of Biden policies and voted for change. Democrats will need to think through how to bring voters back, which is very different than forming the next version of opposition.

We know that when voters become disgusted with one party or the other, some of them stop identifying themselves as members of that party. That is what happened to Democrats over the four years of Joe Biden's presidency. The burden of Biden's poor performance was too great for Kamala Harris to overcome, especially since she showed no intention to move away from Biden's record or plans to do so. The short version is: Joe Biden was a terrible president. His party paid the price. Now, they'll have to come up with a real, not a rhetorical, way to move forward.

